

A Black British Male Perspective of Identities

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ABSTRACT

Recently an email was circulated requesting papers for “the first scholarly investigation of the African Diaspora as an aspect of intra-European history” (Johann-Gutenberg-University, 10-13 November, 2005). The organizers’ stated goal was also to “advance the development of new theoretical and methodological tools to understand the African Diaspora within Europe.” The supporting literature provided a diagram that considers Black European identity in relation to a number of constitutive factors (for instance, social and economic variables, ‘White sample’ ideology, etc). These factors underpinned the motivation for the conference, the recognition that the African Diaspora is understood ‘with’ and through North American academia. Implicitly, the conference literature recognized African-American influence in a detailed list of measurement scales used to generate dimensions of Black identity. Such an approach, in wanting to measure a substance-type identity, embraces positivism and tends to be at odds with Africentricism. This raises a number of problems concerning Black identity: (1) the need for an understanding of Black identity within a local context while recognising the hegemonic position of African-American accounts; (2) finding an appropriate means of empirically giving voice to this conception whilst recognizing the claims of an African particularism, and; (3) allowing a diversity of views or consensus about Black identity to emerge.

The aim of this paper is to respond to these questions from a particular region, that of Black British male identity. This paper will present some of the identity positions articulated by British born African-Caribbean men. In a previous paper, Hylton & Miller (2004) considered Black Identity in term of macro-narratives. That paper provided a historical context to notions of ‘Blackness’, this paper provides a more micro-analytic, fine-grained analysis of Black identity, from an exclusively Black British stance.